

## USING SONGS TO REINFORCE THE LEARNING OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

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**Abstract:** Malaysian students have always faced difficulty in understanding subject-verb agreement (SVA). The reason for this to happen is because of interference from students' first language (L1). However, explicit teaching of this grammar point may increase students' level of anxiety. Therefore, teachers need to camouflage the teaching by including fun elements in the lesson. Thus, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of using songs in enhancing the understanding of SVA. The study adopted quasi-experimental design. Thirty-seven primary five pupils from Sekolah Kebangsaan Sri Pulai were involved. They were divided into two groups, the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group went through the song-based tasks in three different sessions while the control group resumed normal lesson. The instruments used in collecting data were pre-test, post-test, observation of the treatments from a recorded tape, and students' reflection sheet. Data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings showed that song-based activities are useful tools to reinforce the learning of SVA and provide an enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Hence, it is highly recommended that language teachers incorporate songs in grammar lesson.

**Abstrak:** Pelajar-pelajar di Malaysia sering mengalami masalah dalam memahami “subject-verb agreement” (SVA). Ini berlaku kerana terdapat gangguan daripada bahasa pertama mereka. Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk membantu para pelajar memahami peraturan-peraturan dalam SVA. Walau bagaimanapun, pengajaran tatabahasa secara eksplisit mungkin akan meningkatkan tahap kebimbangan pelajar. Jadi, guru perlulah memasukkan elemen-elemen yang menyeronokkan dalam pengajaran. Oleh yang demikian, kajian ini ingin menyiasat keberkesanan penggunaan lagu dalam membantu pemahaman SVA. Kajian ini menggunakan rekabentuk “quasi-experimental”. Tiga puluh tujuh pelajar tahun lima dari Sekolah Kebangsaan Sri Pulai yang terlibat dibahagikan kepada dua kumpulan iaitu kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan. Kumpulan eksperimen menjalani pembelajaran menggunakan aktiviti berdasarkan lagu dalam tiga sesi yang berlainan. Manakala kumpulan kawalan meneruskan pembelajaran seperti biasa. Alat-alat yang digunakan untuk mengumpul data ialah “pre-test”, “post-test”, pemerhatian rawatan dari pita rakaman, dan refleksi pembelajaran dari para pelajar. Analisis data dilakukan dengan cara kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa aktiviti berdasarkan lagu dapat memberikan faedah dalam menolong pelajar memahami SVA dan menyediakan suasana pembelajaran yang menyeronokkan. Maka, adalah digalakkan untuk para guru bahasa bagi menggunakan aktiviti-aktiviti berdasarkan lagu dalam pengajaran tatabahasa.

*Keywords:* songs, subject-verb agreement (SVA)

### Introduction

There are many strategies that students can adopt in understanding grammar points. One of them is by listening to English songs. Songs lyrics should be treated the same as any other texts. Therefore, grammar activities done with the help of a text can also be used with songs lyrics. By using songs to teach grammar, the teacher has nothing to lose but to add variety to the lesson, increase students' motivation and extend students' attention span.

## **Statement of the Problem**

To be able to produce a quality product of English either in speaking or writing, one needs to have a clear understanding of English grammar. It is important for us to produce grammatically correct sentences and utterances for others to comprehend the intended message. Ungrammatical sentences may convey contrasting idea as oppose to the original piece of information.

Understanding the subject-verb-agreement (SVA) in learning English grammar is essential. Students are often confused with the rules of SVA. It is because Malay language does not use the same rules where it is not required for the verb to agree with the subject in a sentence. Interference of students' first language (L1) causes learners confusion.

The subjects in the sentences written in Malay do not influence the verb, whereas, the subjects in the sentences that are written in English do. For example, the verbs used in both Malay sentences are „suka” regardless of the number of subjects involved. The sentences are then translated into English. However, the form of the verb in each of the sentence is not the same in English. In the first sentence, the root verb „love” has changed into „loves” while in the second sentence, the verb retained its form as „love”. It is because in English, the verb used should agree with its subject whereas, in Malay, it does not.

Learning grammar is undoubtedly complicated and at times difficult. Drilling for the same sentence patterns can be exhausting and later will kill the motivation of the students. Besides, this method is not parallel to Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah (KBSR) syllabus that requires sentence patterns to be taught in context and in a meaningful way. By using songs, teachers can introduce grammar points to students in a more conducive environment in order to attract students' attention and develop their interest towards learning grammar.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this research are to:

1. investigate the effectiveness of using songs to reinforce the learning of SVA.
2. find out how students feel towards learning grammar through songs.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is carried out with the purpose of exploring new strategies to teach SVA. It is hoped that the results of this study can assure teachers to use songs to reinforce students' understanding of SVA as a variation to the existing methods in teaching grammar. Hopefully, this would help in facilitating students to understand English grammar better.

Furthermore, this study would be the starting point for teachers to make use of songs to teach other grammar points, skills and vocabulary since the use of songs are inexhaustible. This initiative would surely brings a positive environment to the classroom, strengthen students-teacher relationship, increase students' motivation, and the most importantly change students attitude towards learning English.

In addition, based on the findings, it will be a good move if teachers start to notice students. preferences of music and songs. Teacher can conduct a simple survey asking for their favorite artists and songs and use it in the lesson. This will surely brings an impact towards the teaching as teachers use the songs that are close to the students. hearts.

With the findings gathered from this research, teachers should take serious action and start to include variations in their teaching. A committee of English teachers in each school should start searching and collecting suitable songs lyrics to be used in language classroom to address speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills as well as grammar points and vocabulary. Teachers can set up a resource bank whereby all English teachers are entitled to borrow the materials when needed. This step will surely lessen teachers' burden as they will not have to do it on their own.

Moreover, it is hoped that the findings of this study would initiate MOE to provide schools with commercially-produced educational songs. This will encourage teachers to use songs in classroom and lessen their burden. It is because, to find a suitable song to be used in any language lesson is very difficult. Teachers have to consider a lot of aspects and analyze the songs in detail before utilizing it in order to achieve the desired result.

Finally, it is hoped that all teacher training institutions would consider the findings of this study to design a subject that can expose teacher trainees on how to exploit songs in English classroom.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study involved students in primary five from Sekolah Kebangsaan Sri Pulai. One class from primary five was chosen based on recommendation by the school. This research employed quantitative and qualitative research specifically quasi-experimental since the researcher lack of time and resources to randomize the assignment of subject and might interfere with on-going classrooms as well as the organization of classes. Data were collected from a set of pre-test and post-test questions answered by the experimental and control groups, observation done by the researcher, and structured reflection by students who have undergone treatment sessions.

### **Methodology**

#### **Respondents of the Study**

The respondents of the study were from Sekolah Kebangsaan Taman Sri Pulai, Johor Bahru. This school was chosen because it consists of mixed ability students and located in the suburb of Johor. Class Five Mahir was selected to participate in the study based on the school's recommendation. They were asked to sit for a pre-test. The result of the test was the determining factor for group assignment. Twenty-two top scorers (those who scores 80 percent and above) formed the control group whereas another 15 students were in the experimental group. Students who performed better were not chosen to be in the experimental group because they did not need any enhancement in understanding SVA as much as the experimental group participants.

#### **The Pilot Test**

The test items used in pre-test and post-test were piloted to look at the duration taken for the samples to complete it. Apart from that, the researcher wanted to look at the clarity of the instruction in the test. The two volunteers for the pilot test (Appendix F) were from different schools around Skudai but were at the same age as the sample for this study.

From the pilot test, the researcher found that the instruction in the test paper is clear as the volunteers did not face any difficulty in understanding it. However, the researcher needed to make some changes to the items. The changes made were on item number 32 and 33. Item 32 had a collective noun '*the class*' as the subject where it might confused the students since it is yet to be included in the syllabus for primary five

and item 33 was a repetition for item 21. Therefore, item 32 has been changed to “Every day, the girl *finishes* her meal” and item 33 has been changed to “The sun *sets* in the west”.

## **Discussion**

In comparing the result of the experimental group with that of the control group, we can see that the use of songs had contributed significantly to the reinforcement of SVA of the participants. This is apparent in the noticeably excellent improvement recorded by the 15 participants with 3 students registering an outstanding increment of 100 percent and above. This is in line with the view taken from Madylus (n.d) and Ward (1985) who wrote that songs present a lot of repetition in which it can help to make language memorable. Nesamalar Chitravelu et. al. (2005) agree that the use of songs provide good grammar activities.

Feedbacks from the participants’ reflection also indicated that they enjoyed having to be involved in the experiment. They found that the treatments given were very helpful in understanding the intended grammar points. Likewise, the researcher’s observation revealed that not only the students found the lessons fun, they were also learning something else. For example they were learning how to pronounce words, new vocabulary, and comprehending the lyrics. Their confidence in singing also increased with each subsequent session. Apart from that, they were seen discussing and sharing opinions among themselves in order to complete the tasks. Students who are seemed rather passive at the beginning gradually began to respond actively. All these observation are in accord with the notions forwarded by Bezrukova (1996), Paul (2003), and Nesamalar Chitravelu et. al. (2005). They claimed that songs are popular in grammar teaching because they are interesting, relaxing, and encourage a non-threatening and friendly atmosphere. Cheng (1984) also supports the usefulness of songs in learning a language in his research on ‘Grammar Teaching in Perspective’. He suggests three grammar teaching techniques in his paper which are by using games, sketches, and songs. According to him, popular songs are capable of presenting language structures and help in mastering those structures.

Therefore, songs should be made an integral part of a lesson. They provide both students and teacher with not only an immensely enjoyable time but also possible intensive language instruction and practice simultaneously.

## **Conclusion**

The following conclusion can be drawn based on the findings of the study:

1. This study has shown that songs can help students reinforce the learning of SVA due to its unique characteristics such as in-build repetition, increase motivation, and encourage a non-threatening atmosphere.
2. Students really enjoyed a lesson that has a song as the integral part of it.
3. The choice of songs really influences students’ reaction, successfulness and the effectiveness of the lesson.

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